

How the process works

Early conciliation is when Acas talks to both you and the respondent about your dispute. It gives you the chance to come to an agreement without having to go to an employment tribunal.

By law, early conciliation can only last for a limited time. This is called the early conciliation period. Early conciliation can last up to 12 weeks.

Time limits for making a claim

There are strict time limits for making a claim to an employment tribunal. In most cases, you have 3 months minus 1 day from the date the problem at work happened.

It is important to notify Acas within your employment tribunal time limit. It is up to you to make sure you notify Acas in time.

Some types of claim are 'exempt' from (do not have to go to) early conciliation. We cannot advise whether your claim is exempt.

Find out more about:

- [employment tribunal time limits](#)
- [exemptions from early conciliation on gov.uk](#)

Stages of early conciliation

1. When you [tell us you intend to make a claim](#) we'll ask if you want early conciliation.
2. If you do, we'll ask for some details about the dispute.
3. If you do not, we'll give you a certificate so you'll be able to go to an employment tribunal.
4. We'll send you a confirmation email or letter with your reference number.
5. We'll review the information you have provided – if we need to check anything or get more information we'll call you.
6. If you've told us you cannot use a telephone we'll email you.
7. Once we have all the information we need, we'll assign your case to one of our conciliators.
8. Your conciliator will speak with you or your representative to understand your dispute and how you want it to be resolved.
9. If you agree, they'll contact your employer to see if they're willing to take part in talks.
10. If they are, your conciliator will talk with each of you to see if you can reach an agreement.

Tell your conciliator if you've changed address or do not want it shared with your employer.

Important: If we do not hear back from you, we'll send you the certificate you need to take to an employment tribunal.

If a respondent declines early conciliation

We'll give you a certificate with a number on it. This is the number you need for [form ET1](#), which you use if you decide you still want to make a claim to an employment tribunal.

What conciliators do

We are impartial. This means we're independent of the dispute. We're there to help resolve the dispute without it going to an employment tribunal.

Conciliators can:

- explain their role and the conciliation process
- discuss the issues with both sides
- give an overview of the relevant law
- explore how both parties could resolve the dispute without going to tribunal
- discuss how employment tribunals have considered similar cases

Conciliators are not able to:

- represent either side
- tell you whether to agree on a settlement
- say how strong or weak your case is
- help you prepare your case for tribunal
- make a judgement on how your case could turn out

For this, you might want to [get legal advice](#).

If you reach an agreement

Once you and the respondent reach an agreement, we'll write up what you agree in a conciliation agreement (COT3). This is a legally binding agreement.

It's important that it's right for you. Once you and the respondent agree to it, you'll have to keep to it – even if you have not signed it yet.

We'll send you the COT3 to sign. Once you have signed it, you'll send it to the respondent to sign.

You will not be able to take your case to tribunal if the case is settled in early conciliation, even if you've made a tribunal claim. The case will be closed and there will be no hearing.

If you do not reach an agreement

After early conciliation, we'll give you a certificate with a number on it. You need to put the number on employment tribunal [form ET1](#), which you use if you decide to make a claim.

Time limits after early conciliation

If you've notified us within your time limit, you'll have at least 1 month from the date you received the certificate to make your claim to the [employment tribunal](#).

In some cases, you might have longer than 1 month to make a claim to the employment tribunal. Working out the exact time limit can be complicated. You might want to [get legal advice](#).

It's your responsibility to make sure you make your claim to the tribunal in time. Only a tribunal can decide whether the claim is in time or not. Acas conciliators cannot decide or advise on this point.

Talks up to and during the tribunal claim

You and the respondent can still talk through Acas up to and during the tribunal, until a judgement is made. This is known as 'conciliation' (rather than 'early conciliation').

Conciliation will not affect the outcome of a tribunal and we will not share anything you discuss with anyone else without your permission.

If early conciliation or conciliation does not resolve your dispute and the tribunal continues, your case will be heard in public and a decision will be made by a judge.

Find out more about what happens at [employment tribunals on GOV.UK](#).